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RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 3789
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 1904
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 005521

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SUBJECT: REGIONAL UN HUMAN RIGHTS OFFICE BRIEFS WESTERN DIPLOMATS ON BURMA, UPCOMING PINHEIRO VISIT

REF: BANGKOK 5375

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Classified By: DCM James F. Entwistle, reason 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) The regional UN Human Rights office (OHCHR) in Bangkok is focused on gathering information about what happened during September's protests and subsequent crackdown by the Burmese junta, as well as pushing the UN to incorporate human rights in its response, stated representatives from OHCHR in Bangkok. They added that UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights Paulo Pinheiro for Burma is expected to visit Thailand October 31 - November 4 for meetings with Burmese activists, the international diplomatic community, as well as high level RTG officials. Pinheiro would also attempt to obtain a visa to travel to Burma, a scenario the UN believed is likely. We encouraged the OHCHR representatives to arrange a meeting between Pinheiro and Western diplomats prior to any meeting with RTG officials so that we could present Pinheiro with our views of the RTG response to the current situation in Burma. We also suggested that in Pinheiro's dealings with the RTG he speak frankly about Thailand's so far relatively weak position on Burma. END SUMMARY.

OHCHR MOVING SLOWLY ON BURMA

¶2. (C) In an October 22nd briefing to Western diplomats in Bangkok, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights' (OHCHR) representatives Homayoun Alizadeh

(Regional Representative for South East Asia) and Pablo Espinielua (newly arrived OHCHR Human Rights Coordinator) claimed that they were in constant contact with international organizations and people coming out of Burma as part of their attempt to gather facts and statistics about the recent protests in Burma. To this end, their office is focused on training people how to monitor and collect data about events in Burma. At this point they did not have any specific numbers regarding arrests or deaths but rather have been working off the same numbers put forward by many others (i.e. 50-100 killed during actual protests and thousands more detained). Espinielua stressed that his office has good sources inside and outside of Burma, particularly within religious quarters. Once OHCHR has an accurate picture of what transpired in September and early October, they planned to release a report detailing events, which they expected to be ready in about two months' time.

¶3. (C) In addition to investigating recent events in Burma, Espinielua presented a detailed review of his office's attempts to ensure the UN interagency response included a human rights component. Espinielua reported that UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights Pablo Pinheiro met with UN Special Envoy Ibrahim Gambari just prior to Gambari's early October visit to Burma. Pinheiro passed on messages from civil society about the ongoing human rights violations in Burma and urged Gambari to raise the issue of human rights in his meetings with Burmese officials. But overall the OHCHR representatives painted a frustrating picture of efforts in getting human rights onto Gambari's agenda. They stated Gambair is focused more on getting people released without addressing why they had been arrested in the first place. Pinheiro would be speaking at the UN General Assembly October 22, and the OHCHR representatives in Thailand expect that he would provide more information about Burma's human rights

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crisis during that address.

PINHEIRO TO VISIT REGION THIS MONTH

¶4. (C) In their October 22 briefing, the OHCHR announced that Pinheiro will travel to Thailand October 31 - November 4 to meet with a wide range of actors interested in Burma, including RTG officials. He would also use the trip as another opportunity to push for a visa to travel to Burma, which the OHCHR representatives believed would be granted (though they offered no explanation as to why it would be granted this time after more than three years of refusals). Therefore, OHCHR would develop two scenarios for Pinheiro's visit, one that included a trip to Burma and the other limited to Thailand. The former would be coordinated with the UN country office in Burma. The latter would include meetings with Burmese activists based in Thailand, representatives from the international community, and with RTG officials.

¶5. (C) We made it clear to the OHCHR representatives that Pinheiro should meet with members of the diplomatic community prior to any meetings with RTG officials. This would ensure that Pinheiro understood our views regarding Thailand's official response to the situation in Burma. Alizadeh replied that in their meetings last week the Thai MFA assured OHCHR that those fleeing Burma's recent political crackdown would be given a fair review, though Alizadeh felt that the MFA was reluctant to accept the UN as a full partner in any dealings with Burmese dissidents escaping the political crackdown. (Note: We received unsubstantiated reports over the weekend that the Burmese regime had asked the RTG to crack down on Burmese activists living in Thailand, but several inquiries to our contacts revealed that no such action had been taken by any Thai authorities to date. End Note.) Alizadeh continued that Pinheiro will meet with as high level RTG officials as possible from the Ministries of

Defense, Foreign Affairs, and Interior, though no meetings had been scheduled yet. We added that those meetings would be most useful to all those involved if the UN sent a clear message to the Thais that it was no longer business as usual regarding Burma.

COMMENT

¶6. (C) We defer to our colleagues in Rangoon on the likelihood of the regime there granting Pinheiro a visa after three years of refusing to do so and on how he might best be effective if he does get in. Our focus will be on his time in Thailand. We will encourage him to speak bluntly with the RTG about their so far mixed approach to the human rights and humanitarian aspects of what is happening in Burma, especially in regard to how displaced Burmese, especially activists coming out now, are treated in Thailand. As reftel reports, the RTG plans for dissidents leaving Thailand are still not entirely clear, but appear to limit refugee's options for third country resettlement or continued activism.

END COMMENT.
BOYCE